

Plan Basics



Above: Millers Pond is a community asset.

Introduction

This chapter of the United Southwest Communities Plan provides information about the planning area, its boundaries, how the plan was initiated, the plan drafting process utilizing citizen input, plan outreach and the implications of recognition of the plan by the City of San Antonio.

" You got to be careful if you don't know where you are going, because you might not get there."

-Yogi Berra

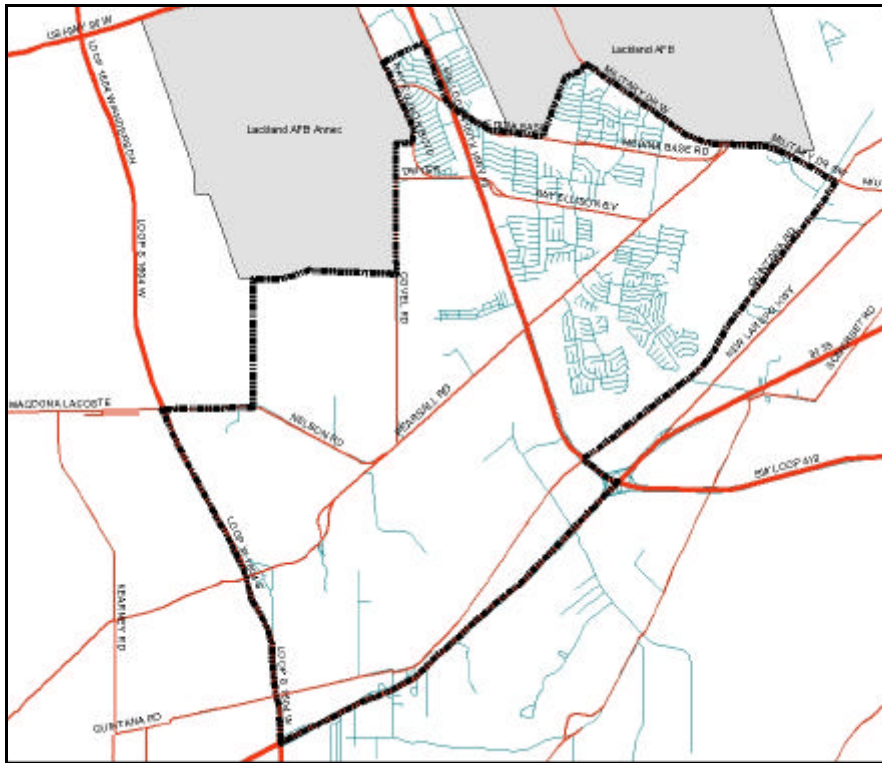
United Southwest Communities Plan

Plan Basics

The United Southwest Communities Plan is a partnership effort of the Hidden Cove/Indian Creek Neighborhood Association, Hillside Acres Good Neighbors, People Active in Community Effort, Southwest Community Association, Valley Forest Neighborhood Association and the City of San Antonio Planning Department. The plan is the result of over a year of hard work by the Planning Team and other active residents and business people.

Plan Boundaries

The planning area is over 22 square miles and is bound by Valley Hi Drive, Medina Base Road and Lackland Air Force Base to the north; Quintana Road and Interstate 35 to the east; Loop 1604 to the South and the City Limits and the Lackland Air Force Base Annex to the west.



Planning Area Map

The developed portions of the planning area are physically isolated from the rest of San Antonio by the Air Force bases to the north and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks to the east.

Three different school districts serve the community: Northside ISD, South San Antonio ISD and Southwest ISD.

Much of the western half of the planning area is agricultural in nature and includes valuable water resources such as the Medina River and Medio Creek. A Bexar Metropolitan Water District reservoir is located in this area.

The area west of Covell Road also includes the Covell Gardens waste management facility and the former Nelson Gardens landfill.

Significant tracts of vacant, unplatted land can still be found in the planning area and offer an opportunity for the Community to guide growth to provide for a better future.

Why create a plan?

Developed by neighbors, businesses, neighborhood associations, community organizations, religious institutions, schools, developers, investors, and other interested groups, the United Southwest Communities Plan is a blueprint for action. By setting goals, objectives and action steps, the community stakeholders create a vision and identify the steps needed to reach their goals. This plan organizes many of the community's ideas into a single document that can be shared with residents, potential community partners and investors. Although there is no specific financial commitment for implementation from the City of San Antonio or identified agencies, the United Southwest Communities Plan will be consulted as guide for decision making.

Planning Area Characteristics

The United Southwest Communities are home to more than 32,000 residents according to the 2000 Census (see Appendix A: Community Demographics). This number represents a 15.9 percent increase in population from the 1990 Census data and is a much stronger growth rate than the area experienced between 1980 and 1990.

According to the 2000 Census, planning area residents are 79 percent Hispanic, 14 percent Anglo, 4 percent African-American and 2 percent other races and ethnicities. Since the 1980 Census, the area has transitioned from an Anglo majority to a Hispanic majority.

The 2000 median household income of \$29,130, which is lower than the citywide median income of \$36,214. According to the Census, the median home value in the planning area was \$46,370 which is also lower than the citywide median of \$68,800.



A home in the Sun Valley area



A home in the Valley Forest area



A home in Indian Creek



A home in Sky Harbour

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The development of the planning area's neighborhoods followed the development of Kelly and Lackland Air Force Bases (see Community History chapter). Much of this area has been platted into conventional subdivisions and mobile home subdivisions. The Gateway Terrace, Valley Forest, Valley Hi, Sun Valley and Hillside Acres neighborhoods were annexed into the City of San Antonio in 1972. Sky Harbour was annexed in 1984. Additional annexations outside Loop 410 between 1985 and 1992 created the current political boundaries.

More than 1,500 dwelling units were added to the planning area between 1980 and 1990 as part of the completion of Sky Harbour, Indian Creek and Hidden Cove. Residential development slowed during the 1990s but the number of vacant units decreased. There is very limited commercial development in the planning area. Most commercial development is limited to the intersections of major thoroughfares with Loop 410 and with collectors that serve as entry points to neighborhoods.

After a period of some stagnation the area has recently begun a building boom that has led to some growing pains. Streets and drainage infrastructure have not been upgraded in many areas and crowding has caused the three school districts to embark upon major bond programs to add classroom space and construct new facilities.

Getting Started

The United Southwest Communities neighborhoods successfully submitted an application to request the Planning Department's assistance in developing a community plan in 2003. In March 2004, the Planning Department began meeting with the Planning Team to develop a Memorandum of Understanding. The Planning Team (see Acknowledgements for a listing) is composed of representatives of planning area neighborhoods and organizations. An initial team was proposed in the application and updated after selection. The Memorandum of Understanding outlined the responsibilities of the Planning Team and the Planning Department for the planning process.



Volunteers work the sign in table at a community meeting

Community-Based Process

The United Southwest Communities Plan was developed following the guidelines set out in the *Community Building and Neighborhood Planning Program*, adopted by City Council in October 1998 and further specified in Article IV of the *Unified Development Code* adopted in 2001 and amended in 2004.

Two community meetings were held in May 2004 to give participants an opportunity to talk about the planning area's strengths and weaknesses. 81 different people attended these meetings to discuss strengths and weaknesses. Community stakeholders, including neighbors, business owners, neighborhood association representatives, religious institution members, school officials and other interested groups, were invited to attend all events and offer their input throughout the planning process.

In September 2004, a Land Use Workshop was held to develop the land use plan for the area. 60 people attended this workshop.

Between October 2004 and January 2005 four workshops were held to draft the majority of the plan. Participants set goals and objectives for the plan and then considered action steps to implement their vision. An additional session was held in February 2005 to discuss how tax increment financing (TIF) can be used in the area to encourage sustainable development and provide adequate public facilities.

The draft plan resulting from the workshops was submitted to relevant City departments to review the plan for consistency with City policies. The agencies proposed as lead partners or partnerships also were asked to review and support the goals and actions found in the plan. The draft plan also was presented at a business community meeting held in May 2005.

A final draft of the plan was presented at a community meeting in June 2005. With requested changes included, the plan was presented to the Planning Commission and City Council for consideration.



Some participants at a community meeting



Participants at the Spanish language table at a community meeting

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Community Outreach

The Planning Department, together with the partnering neighborhoods, worked to encourage participation in the community planning process. The mailing list included over 15,000 homeowners and renters, business owners, owners of commercial and vacant properties, and meeting attendees. In addition, each neighborhood association published the meeting dates in their newsletters. Planning Team members advertised meetings to area businesses and volunteers requested meeting announcements in area religious institutions' newsletters. For each meeting, press releases were issued by the Planning Director. Announcements of the plan were featured in the *San Antonio Express News* and the *Lackland Talespinner*.



Councilman Richard Perez discussed the importance of neighborhood planning at the first public meeting.

Additional community outreach was held at the Sun Valley Neighborhood Sweep, Millers Pond Walkable Community Workshop, Hillside Acres National Night Out, the Millers Pond Blue Santa and the Hillside Acres Neighborhood Sweep.

Recognition by the City of San Antonio

After a review by City departments and a final community meeting, the United Southwest Communities Plan was forwarded to the Planning Commission for consideration. The Planning Commission reviews the document to ensure the Community Plan was created through an inclusive process, is consistent with City policies and accurately reflects the community's values.

After Planning Commission consideration, the plan was forwarded to the City Council for adoption as a component of the City's Comprehensive Master Plan. An approved plan is used by City departments, boards and commissions as a guide for decision making. Key projects may be selected from the plan to be included in the Annual Improvement Project Report. The report is provided to City Council as a part of the budget process, although there is no guarantee of funding.

Consistency with Other Plans

The United Southwest Communities Plan is consistent with the ideas found in the *1997 Master Plan*, the *1978 Major Thoroughfare Plan* and the *1999 Parks System Plan*.

The plan also is supported by the following Master Plan goal:

Neighborhoods, Goal 2: Strengthen the use of the Neighborhood Planning Process and neighborhood plans.

Plan Contents

The Plan Summary Chapter reviews the community's goals and objectives for community improvement. The Community Plan history places the current planning effort in perspective with the historical settlement of lands in the area. The following three chapters—Community Development, Transportation and Infrastructure, and Community Facilities and Quality of Life—include goals, objectives, action steps, lead partners, proposed partnerships and potential funding sources to achieve the community's desired vision. The Taking Action Chapter describes the implementation steps the community will undertake to ensure the plan's vision becomes a reality.

Lead partners are the groups who have volunteered to begin the work of developing the partnerships necessary to implement the action steps. An initial listing of the partnering groups is included under proposed partnerships. The community also identified potential funding sources for the plan's action steps. The lead partner, together with the other partners, could approach these funding sources once the work of coordination is underway.

The Measuring Community Success Chapter describes the indicators the community will use to judge progress toward the plan goals. Finally, the appendices contain background and resource material for the plan.

